

UN | NATURAL SELECTIONS

WILDLIFE IN CONTEMPORARY ART



Comics and Environmental Science Teaching Guide

GRADE LEVELS: 9-12

Key Objectives

Students will draw a three page comic book tracing the anthropocene extinction of one animal.

Key Vocabulary

Anthropocene extinction
Equilibrium
Charismatic megafauna

Artworks Used

Benjamin's Emblem, Walton Ford
Student choice of art in *Un/Natural Selections*

Materials

[Comic Template](#)
[Silent Spring Excerpt](#)
[Graphic Organizer](#)
Pencils (graphite, #2)

TIME

ACTIVITY

SCRIPT

2 min

Introduce Exhibit

Welcome to *Un/Natural Selections*. This exhibit is made up of work by contemporary artists (most of whom are still alive) about animals today and the challenges they face. Today, we are going to learn about those challenges and think about what the animals need to survive. Then, we're going to make comics about some of the animals and environmental science concepts you see here today.

5 min Charismatic
Megafauna
Scavenger
Hunt

Charismatic megafauna are defined as animals who have widespread popular appeal to the public, and, as such, are useful mascots for environmental conservationism (whales, gorillas, giant pandas, etc).

Find one piece of art that features charismatic megafauna and one piece that features **UNcharismatic megafauna** (an animal that would likely not be viewed as cute/cuddly/or popular with the public, but is still essential to the environment).

- Look at the piece of art you feel is a good example of **charismatic megafauna**. Why might the artist have chosen this animal? What argument do they seem to be making about environmental conservation?
- Look at the piece of art you feel is an example of **UNcharismatic megafauna**. Why might the artist have used this animal? What argument do they seem to be making about environmental conservation?

8 min Group Art
Analysis

Walton Ford uses text and illustrations to make an argument about **anthropocene extinction** (extinction caused by humans).

Let's look at *Benjamin's Emblem* by Walton Ford. In it, we see a turkey crushing a now-extinct Carolina Parakeet with excerpts from Benjamin Franklin's *Poor Richard's Almanac* behind it. For five minutes, we will discuss themes about nationalism and extinction in this work:

Turn and talk: With a neighbor, answer the following question: What is the tone of the painting? Use evidence in your response.

Small group: In groups of 4, answer the following question: Why might the artist allude to Benjamin Franklin?

Large group: Considering that many have heard a popular myth that Franklin wanted a turkey to be the national symbol, what argument might the artist be making about America's impact on the environment?

10 min **Extinction
Scavenger
Hunt**

Up until the 19th century, scientists did not believe that animals could go extinct. Many believed that divine power (God) would not allow for animals to go extinct and that animal populations naturally worked towards **equilibrium**: producing enough offspring to take the place of the dead. We now know this is untrue. However, the concept of extinction is a relatively new one.

Go through the exhibit and search for two works of art that touch on the topic of extinction. What argument does the artist seem to be making about the role humans play in extinction? Compare and contrast them using the provided graphic organizer.

30 min **Making
Comics**

Read the provided excerpt from Rachel Carson's *Silent Spring*. This book was a watershed text in the environmental movement, arguing that pesticides and DDT (an insecticide) were causing real and severe damage to animals and the environment. After reading, use the comic template to create a comic that incorporates text from Carson's work about **anthropocene extinction**. You may either make an illustration of Carson's work, or you can tell a different story about extinction that uses the words to illustrate your point in the style of Walton Ford.

Think about the following questions:

- What argument are you making about **anthropocene extinction**?
- What role do humans play in both the problem and potential solutions?

3 min **Wrap-up**

Share your comic with a partner. Briefly explain what story you're telling and how you incorporated Carson's words.

As you browse the gallery, think about the arguments the artists are making about **anthropocene extinction**. What responsibilities do humans have to be stewards to the environment? Are the works hopeful or pessimistic?

2 min **Flex Time**

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W I L D L I F E I N C O N T E M P O R A R Y A R T



Comics and Environmental Science Teaching Guide

GRADE LEVELS: 6-8

Key Objectives

Students will be able to draw a three panel comic about how invasive species enter an ecosystem based on short nonfiction reading.

Key Vocabulary

Symbiosis / Symbiotic
Invasive Species
Colonization
Eco-colonization

Artworks Used

Six Pack Colonialism, Julie Buffalohead
Works by Penelope Gottlieb
Student choice of art in *Un/Natural Selections*

Materials

[Comic Template](#)
[Printed copies of the articles \(one per child\)](#)
[Graphic Organizer](#)
Pencils (graphite, #2)
Printed questions (optional)

TIME

ACTIVITY

SCRIPT

2 min

Introduce Exhibit

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5 min **Group Scavenger Hunt**

Symbiosis describes how two animals get along in their shared habitat. Relationships can be *mutualistic* (both animals benefit, neither is harmed), *commensalistic* (one animal benefits, the other is neither harmed nor benefited), or *parasitic* (one animal benefits, the other is harmed).

Walk around the gallery and find a work of art with animals of different species interacting. Characterize the **symbiotic** relationship in the art. Is it mutualism? Commensalism? Parasitism?

10 min **Group Art Analysis**

Look at *Six Pack Colonialism* by Julie Buffalohead. **Colonization** is a term for when people move to a new place where people already live, take over, and steal natural resources. **Eco-colonization** specifically examines how colonization negatively impacts the environment.

What is the relationship between animals and the Ponca tribe?

Who are the colonizers here? How do you know?
In the painting, what argument do you think Buffalohead is making about Europeans' relationship with nature?

How would you describe colonialism's impact on the environment in the painting? Mutualism? Commensalism? Parasitism? Why?

5 min **Invasive Species Overview**

Look at the three works by Penelope Gottlieb. An **invasive species** is any plant or animal that goes to a place it isn't from (usually introduced by humans) and causes harm to the natural environment.

Find a work of art that features an **invasive species**. What is the invasive species in the art? What harm is it causing?

Climate change is also allowing for **invasive species** to spread faster than before. Why might climate change make it easier for some animals to become invasive?

30 min **Making Comics**

Using the list and template provided, make a one page comic about an **invasive species**. Where did it come from? Did humans

introduce it? How does it cause harm to the environment and other species?

OPTIONS: Rabbits (Australia), Lionfish (North America), Mongoose (Hawaii)

5 min **Wrap-up**

Now let's have 2 volunteers share their comics.
What did you draw? How did the **invasive species** arrive? What harm did it do?

How do invasive species connect to **eco-colonization**? What must humans do to prevent **eco-colonization** from happening?

3 min **Flex Time**

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W I L D L I F E I N C O N T E M P O R A R Y A R T



Comics and Environmental Science Teaching Guide

GRADE LEVELS: 3-5

Key Objectives

Students will be able to draw a three panel comic about how climate change will impact a certain animal using either a realistic, abstract, or surrealist style.

Key Vocabulary

Climate change
Indicator Species
Realism
Abstract
Surrealism

Artworks Used

Cloned Penguin with PET Bottle,
William Sweetlove
Student choice of art in *Un/Natural Selections*

Materials

[Comic Template](#)
[Graphic Organizer](#)
Pencils (graphite, #2)
Printed questions (optional)

TIME

ACTIVITY

SCRIPT

2 min

Introduce Exhibit

Welcome to *Un/Natural Selections*. This exhibit is made up of work by contemporary artists (most of whom are still alive) about animals today and the challenges they face. Today, we are going to learn about those challenges and think about what the animals need to survive. Then, we're going to make comics about some of the animals you see here today.

10 min **Styles of Art
Conversation**

There are lots of different styles artists use to make their arguments. Today, we're going to look at three categories artists might use to make arguments:

Realism: Art that looks realistic. The artist tries to make the subject look as similar to the real thing and its natural surroundings as possible.

Abstract: Art that focuses on the "spirit" of the subject matter. It is not realistic and abstract artists frequently use shapes, unusual brush strokes, or unnatural colors to emphasize their arguments. Abstraction means changed from reality and doesn't look realistic.

Surrealism: This is art that is typically dream-like and appeals to how thoughts can often be confusing and complicated. It features subject matter in other-worldly or unrealistic situations.

Now work with a partner! Go through the exhibit and try to find one piece of art that matches each of those categories! Use the graphic organizer provided to write down your ideas and keep track of your thoughts.

5 min **Group Art
Analysis**

This piece is called *Cloned Penguin with PET Bottle* by William Sweetlove. What style of art do you think this is? **Realism?**
Abstract? Surrealism?

In recent years, penguins have seen their populations declining to the point that several species are at risk of becoming endangered. Penguins, like many birds, are **indicator species**. That means they can tell us a lot about how healthy an environment is. As oceans warm, the ice the penguins need to survive is melting.

The artist is making an argument here about **climate change**. What do you think the artist wants us to think about when it comes to **climate change**? There is no right or wrong answer! Turn and talk with a neighbor about your thoughts.

10 min **Scavenger Hunt**

For ten minutes, examine the works in *Un/Natural Selections*. Identify a work of art that you think contains a message about **climate change**. Look for symbols! Artists will often use fire, melting ice, and water to symbolize **climate change**. With a partner, discuss the two questions for the work of art you pick:

- What makes you think this is a piece about **climate change**?
- What impact does **climate change** have on animals in the art?

25 min **Making Comics**

Make a three panel comic about the impacts of **climate change** on [an animal](#) using either **realism**, **abstraction**, or **surrealism** (or any combination of those) as a style. Be prepared to answer why you picked the style(s) you did.

5 min **Wrap-up**

Turn and talk with a neighbor:

- What animal did you pick? What style?
- Why did you pick that animal and that style to talk about **climate change**?

Let's hear from two volunteers to share their work.

This activity shows us how artists use their art to tell stories about the environment and animals. Moving forward, think about how artists tell stories to teach us lessons about the environment and the dangers animals face due to environmental destruction. As you browse the exhibit, ask yourself what story the artist is trying to tell us.

3 min **Flex Time**

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W I L D L I F E I N C O N T E M P O R A R Y A R T



Comics and Environmental Science Teaching Guide

GRADE LEVELS: K-2

Key Objectives

Students will be able to draw a one panel comic of a speaking animal in its natural habitat and articulate if the habitat is healthy or not and the impact it has on the animal.

Key Vocabulary

Habitat
Endangered
Extinct

Artworks Used

Constant Cycles Strung Together,

JenMarie Zeleznak

California, George Boorujy

The Singer Tract, John Buck

Student choice of art in *Un/Natural Selections*

Materials

[Comic Template](#)

Pencils (graphite, #2)

Printed questions (optional)

TIME

ACTIVITY

SCRIPT

2 min

Introduce Exhibit

Welcome to *Un/Natural Selections*. This exhibit is made up of work by contemporary artists (most of whom are still alive) about animals today and the challenges they face. Today, we are going to learn about those challenges and think about what the animals need to survive. Then, we're going to make comics about some of the animals you see here today.

5 min **Introduce
Comics +
Art Analysis**

A comic is a piece of art that usually has characters talking to each other. We can read the words the characters are saying or the thoughts they're thinking. Do any of you read comics? Do you know of any comics?

Look at *Constant Cycles Strung Together* by JenMarie Zeleznak:

- Do you think the foxes are happy or sad? Why?
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- What do you think the fox is saying? Why?

10 min **Group Art
Analysis**

A **HABITAT** is where an animal lives. A good **habitat** gives an animal the food, water, and shelter it needs to survive and have babies. Sometimes, when humans destroy an animal's **habitat**, they get sick and start to die. When there aren't many of an animal left, they're **ENDANGERED**. When all of that animal dies, they're **EXTINCT**.

Who can tell me any famous animals that went **extinct**?
(If no child mentions dinosaurs, introduce it.)

Dinosaurs went **extinct** before humans even existed, but we still find their bones. Dinosaurs were also the great-great-great-great grandparents of birds.

Here are two pieces of art about birds. This is *California* by George Boorujy and *The Singer Tract* by John Buck. *California* shows a California Condor, and *The Singer Tract* shows an ivory-billed woodpecker. The condor is **endangered** because business and the government put too much pollution in the water, and it made the condor's egg shells too thin to hatch. The ivory-billed woodpecker is **extinct** because too much of its **habitat** was destroyed.

- Do you think the condor is happy or sad? Talk with a friend and discuss your answer.
- What about the woodpecker? Where in the art do you see its **habitat**? What's happening to its **habitat**? Let's discuss this as a group.
- What do you think the condor might say if it could talk? What about the woodpecker? Discuss this with a friend.

10 min **Scavenger Hunt**

With a friend, find one work of art in the exhibit you like that shows an animal in its **habitat**.

- What do you think animals need to be happy in their **habitats**? What might make them sad if they didn't have it?
- Does the animal look happy or sad in its **habitat**? Use three words to describe the **habitat**.

15 min **Making Comics**

Draw a comic panel of an animal you like saying something in its **habitat**. It can be an animal you like from the gallery or an animal you like that's not in the gallery. Show us in your picture if your animal is happy or sad in its **habitat** and show us why.

5 min **Wrap-up**

Let's now have everyone turn and share your comic with a friend. Explain if the animal is happy or sad. Does it have a good **habitat** to live in?

Now let's think together about what humans can do to help animals and keep their **habitats** healthy. What will happen to the animals if we keep their **habitats** safe and clean? Let's discuss answers as a group.
